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Medical Education Adaptations: Really Good Stuff for Educational Transition during a Pandemic

Title

Peer mentoring for medical students during COVID-19 pandemic via a social media platform.

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What problem was addressed?

In many contexts, medical students collaborate with health care workers to deliver patient management and care in emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. In others, medical students are experiencing an unintended pause in their education due to global university closure over COVID-19

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concerns. In either situation, students find themselves coping with mental and emotional issues, including stress, anxiety, and fear, that may require significant psychological and physical effort. Therefore, it is important that medical schools not only care about students' mental health but also implement strategies to support their understanding of crisis management, self-mental care, and other principal measures in order to strengthen their coping skills and mental preparedness.

What was tried?

In collaboration with students of Shiraz medical school, a social media platform was created that employed the Near Peer Mentoring method¹ by having senior medical students instruct junior medical students in coping with the anxiety and stress brought by COVID-19 pandemic. These senior students had about 40 hours of training in teaching and learning methods, communication skills, and effective consulting techniques under the supervision of faculty during the preceding three years¹. 371 junior students joined this group. Students communicated with each other, exchanging thoughts and feelings about mental and psychological issues. Ten senior students, under the supervision of expert faculty, offered suitable solutions to psychological concerns and supported junior students in managing their emotions about this highly contagious disease. They recommended stress relaxation techniques, engaging in exercise, remaining in online contact with family and friends, time management during quarantine, etc. General discussion about the best learning strategies for online classes also took place.

What lessons were learned?

A valid and reliable questionnaire, based on our previous study,¹ was used to measure the effect of this activity. 71% of junior medical students believed the platform had a significant impact on helping them adjust faster to these emergency conditions. The only barriers mentioned by the students was that some were not sure how to apply the information gained to their personal situation as the continued to desire real and practical face-to-face consultation. Nonetheless, students generally reported this activity was a unique experience that was beneficial for their professional growth.

Care and support have a critical role in promoting mental health in medical students. Building a peer mentoring group can help. With the experience achieved through working with these students in this

crisis, senior medical students could provide timely and appropriate psychological advice for others. The experience, therefore, appeared to be as important for their professional growth as it was for the mental relief of more junior students. Keeping in mind the concept of "Teaching is Learning Twice," we have learned that by taking on peer mentoring leadership responsibility, senior students can further the competencies they need to be competent physicians.

Reference

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